United Nations A/HRC/38/NGO/1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 June 2018

English only

**Human Rights Council**
**Thirty-eighth session**
18 June-6 July 2018
Agenda item 4
**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

# Written statement* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 May 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.18-08844(E)
*1808844*

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# The Role of FECRIS and Anti-Cult Organization in Russia

***The Role of FECRIS and Anti-Cult Organizations in the Russian Federation***

CAP is an association created in 2000 to unite minority religions in Europe to counter discrimination concerning the right to freedom of conscience and belief. It has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

*This paper covers the role played by anti-cult organizations in the repression of religious minorities in Russia, and in particular the members of FECRIS, the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism.*

FECRIS was created back in 1994 by the French anti-sect movement with the intent to reach and influence the European and international scene in order to export the "French anti-sect model" abroad.

**The Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS)**

In spite of its public financing by the French secular Republic, FECRIS has a Russian Vice-President, Alexander Dvorkin, who belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church and "fights" against targeted religious minorities he sees as competitors to the Orthodox faith.

He is the most infamous anti-sect activist in Russia and the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS). His militant activities are relying on the Spiritual Security concept, as defined by the Putin administration in 2000 as follows:

> "Assurance of the Russian Federation's national security also includes protecting the cultural and spiritual-moral legacy and the historical traditions and standards of public life, and preserving the cultural heritage of all Russia's peoples. There must be a state policy to maintain the population's spiritual and moral welfare, prohibit the use of airtime to promote violence or base instincts, and counter the adverse impact of foreign religious organizations and missionaries."

Since then, Dvorkin has used this concept as the grounds for a campaign against religious minorities based on paranoia of "foreign" enemies and "foreign" ideas, and for measures to unduly restrict freedom of religion or belief of Russian citizens who have decided to follow a non-consensual spiritual path.

**Hate Speech and Disparagement**

The FECRIS Vice-President has been engaged in hate speech and disparagement against so-called "sects" for over twenty years, accusing religious minorities of being "foreign agents" acting as enemies to Russia. Dvorkin has fueled suspicion and prejudice against the Mormons, Hare Krishna devotees, New Pentecostals, Falun Gong members, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists and others, leading to repression such as banning, imprisonment and incitement of hatred that leads to physical violence, threats, vandalism and similar aggression.

As an example, on 26 August 2009, Alexander Dvorkin commented to the news agency "Access":

> Mormons are a huge international business corporation that operates under the guise of a religious organization. Moreover, we can recall several instances when American Mormon missionaries were spotted on the territory of secret military facilities. For many years experts speak about a close relationship of this organization with the CIA.

He commented further about *New Life*, one of the Neo-Pentecostal sects according to him which is also known for its destructive activities : "One of the most famous Neo-Pentecostal preachers on the post-Soviet space - Alexei Ledyaev – openly speaks about the necessity to create a new world order in which Neo-Pentecostals will rule with the U.S. president at the head."

Dvorkin has a long history of hate speech in the media against religious minorities in Russia and the former Soviet States. For instance, during an interview for NTV he paralleled Jehovah's Witnesses with drug dealers and called them "slaves". Thereafter, the documentary was repeatedly cited as a motive for incitement to violence against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Dvorkin has also forwarded the position that no dialogue should be established between the Orthodox Church and religious minorities.

In August 2009, Alexander Dvorkin commented for the news agency "Access" on the refusal of the Chelyabinsk Orthodox Diocese to participate in the opening day of an event because of the presence of Mormons and Neo-Pentecostals:

> I think that the Chelyabinsk Diocese made the only right decision when they refused to take part in the event in which representatives of totalitarian sects are involved. Orthodoxy is a traditional religion in our country and any collaboration with such organizations is impossible. Imagine if some crooks have arranged their get-together and invited the police to participate in it.

This hate speech has fueled animosity against religious minorities in Russia and incidents of physical violence have resulted from this stirring up of hatred, such as violence against persons: verbal insults, physical threats or attacks, and violence against property, including vandalism and attacks against places of worship, community property, and residences of members of religious groups.

Dvorkin's hate speech against Hindus in Russia has caused a demonstration to protest Dvorkin on February 3, 2017, in front of the Russian embassy in New Delhi, India.

Valery Rashkin, Duma deputy of the Communist Party, shared the belief that Dvorkin was behind the persecution that Shri Prakash Ji, the most prominent Hindu leader in Russia, and his followers have suffered, much the same way that Dvorkin not only used the authorities to harass the Jehovah's Witnesses but also stirred up anti-Jehovah's Witness sentiment among Russian nationalists.

**The Council for Expert Religious Analysis**

Hate speech has induced the Russian government to adopt repressive measures. Such activities of the Russian anti-cult movement are clearly a factor in the persistence and aggravation of the situation of religious minorities in Russia.

Aleksander Dvorkin was the head of the *Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies* under the Main Department of the Ministry of Justice for some years.

The Council has been invested since 2009 with the power to investigate the activity, doctrines, leadership decisions, literature and worship of any religious organisation and recommend action to the Russian Ministry of Justice.

Therefore Dvorkin, who is now the Deputy Head of the Council, is in a position to advise the Russian Ministry of Justice regarding which groups should be permitted to register as religious organizations and which groups should not be considered religions.

Another aspect of the activity FECRIS in Russia is the referral of followers of religious minorities to so-called "Rehabilitation Centers".

**FECRIS Russian Rehabilitation Centers**

Dvorkin is also President of the *Saint Ireneus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies*, the FECRIS member association in Russia.

The St Ireneus Centre is an anti-sect centre founded in 1993 with the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II. It is a missionary faculty department of St Tikhon's Orthodox University in Moscow.

The Saint Ireneus Centre also heads a network of anti-sect associations, called the Russian Association of Centres for Religious and Sectarian Studies, whose President is also Alexander Dvorkin.

On the advice of this anti-sect network, families who disagree with the choice of one of their relatives to adhere to a non-traditional religion take them to so-called "rehabilitation centres" held by Orthodox priests where these followers of minority religions are induced under pressure to recant their faith and return to the Orthodox fold.

This approach recalls the criticized "deprogramming" which has been found to be illegal and to violate followers' right to freedom of religion or belief: "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice" pursuant to Article 18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This right is also protected under the European Convention on Human Rights.

**Conclusion**

FECRIS and its anti-cult associations in Russia should be prevented from continuing their harmful and illegal activities which violate the right of peaceful followers to religion or belief.

States, like Russia, have a duty of neutrality in religious matters under international human rights law – a duty which has been constantly affirmed by the European Court of Human Rights and United Nations institutions.

Dialogue can and should exist between recognized religions and religious minorities, and Russia should discontinue listening to those who constantly spread hatred and social unrest in the country.

See the book published in Russian on FECRIS and its Russian Chapter at: https://books.google.ru/books?id=IVurAQAAQBAJ&lpg=PA1&hl=ru&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false

See also the article on the attacks against Hindus in Russia at: http://dailycaller.com/2018/02/21/russia-war-on-religious-minorities-shri-prakash-ji/